

HEALTH

What You Can Do to Prevent and Manage Your Hypertension

It is important to take steps to keep your blood pressure under control. The treatment goal is blood pressure below 140/90 and lower for people with other conditions, such as diabetes and kidney disease. However, since the new category of prehypertension applies to patients with a systolic pressure of 120-139 mm Hg and a diastolic pressure of 80 and 89 mm Hg, it is very important to implement lifestyle changes that will keep your blood pressure at a safe measurement. Previously, systolic pressure up to 139 mm Hg, along with a diastolic pressure up to 89 mm Hg, had been considered normal or "high-normal." Adopting healthy lifestyle habits is an effective first step in both preventing and controlling high blood pressure. If lifestyle changes alone are not effective in keeping your pressure controlled, it may be necessary to add blood pressure medications.

Research has shown that following a healthy eating plan can both reduce the risk of developing high blood pressure and lower an already elevated blood pressure. For an overall eating plan, consider the DASH eating plan. "DASH" stands for "Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension," a clinical study that tested the effects of nutrients in food on blood pressure. Study results indicated that elevated blood pressures were reduced by an eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy foods and is low in saturated fat, total fat, and cholesterol. The DASH eating plan includes whole grains, poultry, fish, and nuts and has reduced amounts of fats, red meats, sweets, and sugared beverages.

A second clinical study, called "DASH-Sodium," looked at the effect of a reduced dietary sodium intake on blood pressure as people followed either the DASH eating plan or a typical American diet. Results showed that reducing dietary sodium lowered blood pressure for both the DASH eating plan and the typical American diet. The biggest blood pressure-lowering benefits were for those eating the DASH eating plan at the lowest sodium level (1,500 milligrams per day). The DASH-Sodium study shows the importance of lowering sodium intake whatever your diet. But for a true winning combination, follow the DASH eating plan and lower your intake of salt and sodium.

For more information on the DASH program visit the following website at:
www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp/prevent/h_eating/start.htm



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